

Fact Sheet

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POLAND: RETROGRESSION CONTINUES

Gomulka, long imprisoned during the Stalinist era, emerged from the tumult of October 1956 with virtually the stature of a Messiah in the eyes of the Poles. Unprecedented cultural freedom was allowed. Terror was renounced as an instrument of control. Farm collectivization was abandoned and persecution of the Catholic Church was suspended.

The Polish people assumed that these moves presaged a rebirth of cultural and religious freedom, economic well being, and enlightened government. However, these delusions faded soon. Although more farsighted and realistic than his predecessors, it became obvious that Gomulka was also a steadfast Communist. He and his lieutenants subsequently have managed to alienate the Polish workers, the youth, the intellectuals and the clergy alike.

The Gomulka regime, for its part, had hoped that the Polish people would willingly regiment themselves, accepting personal privations and unfulfilled promises for the sake of "building socialism." However, the regime itself closed off any such possibilities by its gradual re-imposition of harsh measures, particularly against the intellectuals and the Catholic Church. The disillusionment between the people and the regime has become mutual and almost complete.

Gomulka's foreign policies have disappointed as badly as his domestic performance and for largely the same reasons -- unwillingness to read the signs of the times. He could not see that the policies of Communist regimes, as well as of individuals, might undergo basic changes at the prospect of Stalinism on the way out and world communist solidarity crumbling. Instead of recognizing the developing trend toward autonomy in the European satellite states, Gomulka dreamt of an inward oriented Soviet Bloc, with Moscow preoccupied with Peking, and Poland playing the situation to its advantage. Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany could enjoy a special status within the bloc. The Council for Economic Mutual Assistance (CEMA) was counted on to solve Warsaw's economic bottlenecks by forcing Bloc industry and investment into an artificial mold favoring Poland.

European Communism's actual development wrecked many of Gomulka's plans. Gomulka's fence-sitting in the Sino-Soviet dispute and his attempts to use it to his own advantage hurt his relationships with Khrushchev and with some other Bloc regimes. It remains to be seen if the damage was materially repaired by his condemnation of the Chinese at the Fourth Party Congress in June. Another part of Gomulka's economic design was wiped out by Rumania's rejection of not only the Soviet idea for CEMA's supra-national economic planning, but also of Poland's special suggestion for joint bloc investments, specialization and control of exports. Gomulka's typically communist schemes for propping up Poland's economy went down the drain precisely because they collided with Rumania's drive for independence from such measures.

As Poland sinks deeper into a rut it is treated to the view of Rumania throwing off bloc economic restraints, expanding its trade with the West, freeing political prisoners and de-Russifying itself in all sectors. Czech intellectuals are enjoying unprecedented leeway to question and examine openly in

cultural-political affairs, a trend contrasting sharply with Poland's increasing censorship, curtailments and general crackdown on its intellectuals. The Gomulka regime's longstanding differences with the Catholic Church have grown into a program of systematic, planned harassment of church institutions. Here again the Polish regime is running counter to the trend of growing accommodation between bloc regimes and the Vatican, as in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In fact, an observer is hard put to find any important issue on which the Gomulka regime is not in futile opposition to the inexorable tide of events.